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HISTORICAL FRAGMENTS

THE CHICAGO CONVENTION OF 1860

The results of the work of the Chicago Convention of 1860 were undoubtedly more momentous than those of any other presidential nominating convention in our history. This fact affords justification, if any be needed, for printing the two fragments which follow. Charles C. Sholes, author of the first, was a prominent pioneer editor and business man of Wisconsin. His letter, taken from the manuscripts in the State Historical Library, is chiefly interesting for the revelation it affords of the utter lack of realization, by this exceedingly keen-minded and well-informed participant, of the disunion and civil war which were to follow in the train of the presidential election of 1860. So little, apparently, did the impending event cast its shadow before!

It is said that but one member of the Chicago convention of 1860 is still alive. Among the eyewitnesses of the gathering, however, was Amherst W. Kellogg, now a citizen of Madison, who has been a resident of Wisconsin since 1836. His story of the event as retained in his memory, supplements interestingly the contemporary narrative from the inside, written by C. C. Sholes to his friend, Senator Doolittle.

KENOSHA, May 21, 1860.

HON. J. R. DOOLITTLE

DEAR SIR:

Your letter of the 10th I found on my table, after my return from the National Convention at Chicago.

The suggestions you make *had* occurred to my own mind: and although I felt compelled in Convention, as the representative of the sentiment of the people of this Congressional district and the State, to vote uniformly with my colleagues for *W. H. Seward*, I confess I had serious misgivings as to the *entire safety* of making this nomination. These *misgivings*, as the result shows, were somewhat general: I *feel* that "wise counsels" *did* prevail; and that the *man* or *men* selected as our standard-bearers in the great contest now opening, are *more sure* to lead us on to triumph, than

any others the Convention could have nominated—"Old Abe" will secure us Illinois and Indiana beyond a peradventure, whether Douglass is in the field or not—of this, our friends in these two States give us the most *positive* and animating assurances—And the course of the Pennsylvania delegation in adopting Lincoln, as they did almost unanimously after the first ballot, gives indication of what may be expected of that great State—so confident and enthusiastic, indeed, were the gentlemen composing this delegation, that after the nomination, they appeared in the Convention, bearing aloft, on banners, a pledge of 20,000 majority for the favorite son of Illinois. Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania are *sure*—they are *doubtful* states no longer—But while doubtful States are rendered sure, it may be asked are there none of the heretofore sure Republican States rendered doubtful. I can fix my eye on but one State where a shadow or cloud is likely to appear. The battle ground, instead of being the Key Stone State, *may be* the Empire State. And it occurs to me that the Democracy, now that the hopes of Douglass are extinguished in the North-west, will be forced to pass him by at Baltimore, and take up Seymour, with a view of securing New York. This is all, it seems to me, that is left for them to do—and (though I am glad to think it a *forlorn* hope) I look for this to be the controlling policy or idea of the Democratic Convention in June. If Douglass, when over-slaughed at Baltimore, determines to be in the field any way, as I trust he will, why all the better. This will be more than an offset for all the defection that can be occasioned to our disadvantage by the nomination of Bell, Houston, or any body else north or south with a view of catching conservative or *American* votes; and will render our success doubly certain. All the aspects are *now* in our favor: and I can conceive of no plan by which our opponents, however wily, can beat us before the people, or succeed in throwing the election into the House of Representatives.

The Convention at Chicago was the most *magnificent* assemblage of men ever before convened on this continent. Called together by a common sentiment and object, from every quarter of the Union, *all* animated by motives of patriotism and humanity, the highest, holiest, and noblest that can excite and influence

the human mind, what other than *magnificent* results may be expected to flow from their deliberations and action. And when their work was done—their principles proclaimed and their standard-bearers acclaimed,—why should not thirty thousand “hearts and voices” rush as it were into *one*, and with a feeling and enthusiasm knowing no bounds, pour forth a shout of ratification, rising above even the thunders of heaven?—a shout which will be taken up and echoed and re-echoed throughout the free north, inspiring and strengthening the great Republican army, and leading these to a certain and glorious triumph in the Presidential contest! As a manifestation of the strength and unity of popular sentiment in regard to the pro-slavery policy of the present Administration, its corruptions, and the outrages upon all righteous principles which have characterized it, this Convention was most remarkable. And, unless all signs go for nought, we are on the eve of a popular uprising and commotion which will gather strength with every succeeding day and week till November, when with an almost whirlwind force, the abusers of trust in the high places of the land, will be hurled into depths, which the hand of resurrection can never sound. I see distinctly *now* a Providence in the election of James Buchanan. It was permitted, that the cup of iniquity not then quite full, might be filled to overflowing; and that the people not then quite roused to a full sense of their wrongs and their danger, might with further and more complete manifestations of wickedness, and the nefarious designs of the Slave Oligarchy, be *driven* into a revolution more searching, and thorough and radical, with more enduring and beneficial results. This is my philosophy. And before the close of the administration of Abraham Lincoln, we may expect to see a movement for a satisfactory solution and settlement of the great problem—how Slavery is peacefully and satisfactorily to be disposed of. My view on this point accords with yours. *Your* plan is the only practicable one; and I am satisfied, when the present crisis is happily passed by the election and inauguration of a Republican president and administration, that the public mind will settle upon this plan and demand its adoption. It will be the *grand issue* before the lapse of two years. Our next

President (after Lincoln) will be elected on a colonization platform; and who our standard-bearer will be to lead us to victory on this great issue, it does not need a prophetic ken to determine. That Heaven may bless and preserve and strengthen him who it now seems to me, is its chosen instrument for this glorious work, in its prosecution and consummation, is the fervent desire of

Yours, very respectfully

and truly

C. C. SHOLES

It will gratify me much to have an occasional word from you.

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION
OF MAY, 1860

In the spring of 1860 I was secretary of the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company of Milwaukee. The president of the company was S. S. Daggett, a man seventy years of age and of great personal dignity and much ability. Both Mr. Daggett and myself, like most Westerners of New England origin, belonged to the Republican party and watched the growing forces of Republicanism with eager interest. Four years before, I had voted for John C. Frémont; since his defeat the Republican party had grown rapidly. Now with a divided Democracy there seemed hope that a Republican candidate might be elected. We therefore took great interest in the choice of the candidate for the party. Mr. Daggett and I favored the nomination of William H. Seward, but we were ready to support anyone whom the convention might nominate.

The convention met in Chicago in the middle of May. No building was large enough to hold the crowds that flocked there, so a temporary board structure was built, named the Wigwam, capable of accommodating some ten thousand people; more than half of them, however, had only standing room. Mr. Daggett proposed to me that we should visit the convention, but when we arrived on the morning of the second day we could obtain only standing room tickets. I have no clear recollection of the occurrences of the morning of our arrival; in the afternoon of the

second day, as I remember, there was a large mass meeting in front of the Wigwam which was addressed by William H. Seward. Mr. Daggett and I attended this meeting, and from the enthusiasm aroused by Seward we expected as well as hoped that he would secure the nomination.

On the morning of the third day we hurried to the convention and were present when the balloting began. The Wigwam was packed to its utmost capacity, so that there was hardly room to hold the tally sheets that each one wanted to keep for himself as the ballots were announced. As the roll of the states was called, the chairman of each delegation presented the name of that state's candidate, which was hailed with cheers and shouts until a great tide of emotion was aroused. When Illinois presented the name of Abraham Lincoln I was much surprised at the demonstration that occurred; however, when Seward was nominated by New York he seemed to awaken even greater enthusiasm. Salmon P. Chase was Ohio's favorite son; Edward Bates was Missouri's choice; Pennsylvania presented Simon Cameron. On the first ballot Seward had more votes than any of the others, but not enough for a nomination. Before the second ballot was taken Simon Cameron withdrew his name and his votes went to Lincoln, who then almost equaled Seward's vote. With the third ballot the excitement grew intense; state after state turned over to Lincoln, and he seemed likely to succeed; but we who had been keeping tab found as the last vote was cast that he was two votes short of the number necessary to nominate. Then just before the figures of the ballot were to be announced Cartter of the Ohio delegation got the floor and shouted, "Ohio changes four votes from Salmon P. Chase to Abraham Lincoln." With that such a wave of emotion swept over the vast audience as I have never seen in all my experience; women threw up their parasols and men their hats. Though we were packed in so that we could scarcely move, my companion, Mr. Daggett, danced up and down like a boy. One man standing beside us down whose face the tears were pouring in streams cried out, "I can't help it! I can't help it! I've been working for him a week and I didn't really hope for it." Another old man near us began to shout at

the top of his voice, "Glory, Glory Hallelujah! Now Lord, lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen the redemption of *Egypt*" (as southern Illinois was then called).

Meanwhile the chairman of the New York delegation secured the eye of the chairman of the convention, George Ashmun of Massachusetts, and moved that the vote for Abraham Lincoln be made unanimous. With that the enthusiasm broke out afresh and continued until the audience was fairly exhausted.

Mr. Daggett and I returned to Milwaukee enthusiastic for the election of Lincoln. As the months went on we were more and more convinced that the Chicago convention had been guided to the right choice at that crisis in our country's history.

AMHERST W. KELLOGG

INCREASE ALLEN LAPHAM, FATHER OF FOREST CONSERVATION

The father of forest conservation in Wisconsin was the state's first, and in many respects, still, foremost, scholar, Increase Allen Lapham. This quiet, modest man, the impress of whose genius was indelibly stamped upon the developing institutions of the new territory and state, was wholly self-made and largely self-educated. Born in New York in 1811, the son of a civil engineer employed in canal work, he became, almost in boyhood, an engineer, and this profession he followed through life. His avocation, likewise from boyhood, was the pursuit of knowledge, particularly along the line of the natural sciences.

The remarkable thing about Increase Lapham was his versatility of mind coupled with his ability to perceive, well in advance of his age, the scientific and social desires and demands of the future. Thus we find him, still a mere youth, almost a century ago pointing to the need for a cyclopædia of American agriculture and proposing a well-thought-out scheme for bringing one into existence. The thing was not accomplished, of course, because Lapham was half a century or so in advance of his time, and his project evoked, therefore, no response on the part of the public he labored to benefit. Again, Lapham's appreciation of the scientific and cultural value to society of the